

Alternative Memories

What is history but a fable agreed upon? - Napoleon Bonaparte

There are many inherent advantages to being an only child. Within the families of descendants of Lewis (H.) Blackledge, Debbie Tipton Lyon has experienced those blessings; perhaps Sarah Grace Woods will as well.

One obvious advantage: it would be much easier to agree upon the fables of our youth. In particular, there would be very little competition for the *"Most Beloved Sibling"* contest we once held in my family. Another plus that comes to mind: once your parents are gone, and you tell a story, that's the way the story is recorded. Much like the concept of "the victors write the history." As Robert the Bruce states in the opening to Braveheart, "Historians from England will say I am a liar, but history is written by those who have hanged heroes."

One can't get away with that when one has siblings. The best we can do is present *Alternative Sibling Memories*.

The phrase "alternative facts" leapt into the American lexicon shortly after Donald J. Trump was sworn in as the 45th President of the United States. From Wikipedia:

"**Alternative facts**" is a phrase used by U.S. [Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway](#) during a [Meet the Press](#) interview on January 22, 2017, in which she defended [White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer's](#) false statement about the attendance at [Donald Trump's inauguration](#) as President of the United States. When pressed during the interview with [Chuck Todd](#) to explain why Spicer "utter[ed] a provable falsehood", Conway stated that Spicer was giving "alternative facts". Todd responded, "Look, alternative facts are not facts. They're falsehoods."

Conway's use of the phrase "alternative facts" to describe demonstrable falsehoods was widely mocked on social media and sharply criticized by journalists and media organizations, including [Dan Rather](#), [Jill Abramson](#), and the [Public Relations Society of America](#). The phrase was extensively described as [Orwellian](#). By January 26, 2017, sales of the book [Nineteen Eighty-Four](#) had increased by 9,500%, which [The New York Times](#) and others attributed to Conway's use of the phrase, making it the number-one [bestseller](#) on [Amazon.com](#).

Most interesting to me is that Orwell was invoked. It was Orwell who wrote in 1984, "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."

al·ter·na·tive *adjective*

1. (of one or more things) available as another possibility.

"the various alternative methods for resolving disputes"

<i>synonym</i>	different, other , another , second , possible , substitute , replacem
----------------	--

<i>ms:</i>	ent , alternate ; standby , emergency , reserve , backup , auxiliary , fallback "an alternative route"
------------	--

Yet in our family, perhaps in most families and in genealogy in particular, we are often confronted with alternative facts. We call them “sibling memories.” We have experienced them throughout our lives and you will find examples of alternative facts throughout this book.

The phrase "alternative facts" was claimed to be similar to a phrase used in Trump's 1987 book, [Trump: The Art of the Deal](#). In that book, "truthful hyperbole" was described as "an innocent form of exaggeration—and... a very effective form of promotion." The book claimed that "people want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular." The [ghostwriter](#) of the book, [Tony Schwartz](#), said he coined that phrase and claimed that Trump "loved it".

Conway later defended her remarks: "Two plus two is four. Three plus one is four. Partly cloudy, partly sunny. Glass half full, glass half empty. Those are alternative facts."

Of course, our father brought us up to believe that Blackledges are the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. No question. In this book, the reader will find we come down squarely on the side of Kellyanne. Where known or insisted upon, we present all “alternative facts” regarding a memory.

Before we move on, as the writer and compiler of this collection, I consider it useful to examine the reply by Tiako on Reddit.com re this subject:

It is a very lazy and ultimately harmful way to introduce the concept of bias. There isn't really a perfectly pithy way to cover such a complex topic, but much better than winners writing history is *writers* writing history. This is more useful than it initially seems because until fairly recently the literate were a minority, and those with enough literary training to actually write historical narratives formed an even smaller and more distinct class within that. To give a few examples, Genghis Khan must surely go down as one of the great victors in all history, but he is generally viewed quite unfavorably in practically all sources, because his conquests tended to harm the literary classes. Or within my speciality, the senatorial elite can be argued to have "lost" the struggle at the end of the Republic that eventually produced Augustus, but the Roman literary classes were fairly ensconced within (or at least sympathetic towards) that order, and thus we often see the fall of the Republic presented negatively.

Of course, writers are a diverse set, and so this is far from a magical solution to solving the problems of bias. The painful truth is, each source simply needs to be evaluated on its own merits.

rabbit